

## PSYCHOLOGY WORKS Fact Sheet: Young Kids and Screens

### Effects of Screen Use

Children have access to and use technology and electronic devices more than ever before. While technology provides access to helpful information, tools to get things done, and fun entertainment, it can also have negative impacts, particularly for children. This can include replacing other activities needed for healthy growth and development and negatively impacting emotional and social well-being. Here is a sample of some of the most commonly found effects we have discovered so far:

- While live, dynamic interactions with caring adults are best for children's development, age-appropriate educational media can also support language, reading, cognitive and social development.
- Technologies can be used to encourage and compliment physical activity and motor milestones.
- Although specific uses of digital technology can support some developmental tasks, too much or excessive use is associated with:
  - language delays, lower cognitive abilities, and delayed reading skills
  - reduced emotional self-regulation ability and behaviour problems
  - social skills deficits
  - poorer motor development
  - poor sleep when viewed before bed

### Recommendations for Use

Here are some recommendations to make sure kids are not over-exposed to screens, particularly during the early years of brain development:

- Under 2 Years: No Screen Time.
- 2-5 Years: Less Than 1 Hour per Day.
- Currently there are no specific published guidelines for amount of screen use for children over 5 years of age. It is commonly recommended by clinicians that school-aged children not exceed 1 hour of recreational screen time per school day and not over 2-3 hours per weekend day, with flexibility for age and ability level.
- Some provinces have implemented a "no personal device policy" at school. While research is pending on its effectiveness, this appears to be a useful policy and likely helpful for elementary school-aged children's overall development and well-being.
- Short periods of use broken up by whole body movement activities.
- Avoid screens after 7pm and at least 1 hour before bed.



- Prioritize educational, age-appropriate, and interactive material – no violent content for younger children. For older children, violent content should be monitored and debriefed with parents.
- Caregivers be present and engaged while young children are using digital media. This allows for active supervision as well as an opportunity to spend time with and get to know the interests of your children.
- Turn off screens when not in use. Passive screen use (e.g., TV's on in the background) has been found to be associated with more negative effects of screen use as described above.

## Caregiver Strategies

It can be challenging to know how best to implement screen limits with children. Here are some parenting strategies that can help:

- Role model healthy screen behaviour: Caregiver screen use is associated with child screen use and more negative effects for children.
- Have whole family, regular screen-free time: Everybody Unplug!
- Develop proactive structure and limits around screen use. Timing and tracking devices may be of use here. Start when children are young.
  - Plan ahead for when children will get screen time, so you do not have to decide every time they ask.
  - Understand your child's screen activity so that you can support them in ending well. Can it be saved at certain points? Does a video length go beyond their time limit? Help them choose the screen activity and be specific around the type of media activity they will use, for example, "surfing" is harder to end and supervise.
  - Prioritize screen activities that have positive benefits, such as educational apps and video connections with loved ones.
- Allow screen time only after completing other needed tasks, for example, homework, physical activity, social activities.
- Give a time warning before ending screen time so they can prepare to end or save their activity.
- Do not extend the screen time in response to protests – validate their feelings of sadness and disappointment, coach them through regulating their emotions if upset and stick to the limit.
- Learn and practice emotion self-regulation strategies to cope with child protests, for example, mindfulness, self-compassionate statements, and calm breathing.
- Have an activity or task ready to move to after the screen time has ended and gently guide them to it.
- Reward children with praise when they end screen time at the first request.
- If children act out when screen time ends, have a natural consequence prepared which the children know about ahead of time.



- For older children who have been allowed to engage with social media, require that they include you in their “friend” groups and allow you to follow them. This can be explained as part of your job in keeping them safe.
- For older children who have been allowed to participate in group chats, they need to allow random caregiver checks on content to ensure their safety and that they are learning to engage with friends online appropriately. While children may need more teaching, restrictions, and/or supervision if mistakes are made, make sure to stay calm and approachable around these discussions. It is most helpful if your older children come to you so you can problem-solve collaboratively how to move forward in a positive way.
- Additional strategies for monitoring and managing cyber-bullying risk factors for older children can be found on the *Teens and Screens* Fact Sheet.

## Additional Resources

We know that parenting around screen time and digital media use can be hard. Technology and programs are designed to be rewarding and make it hard to stop. Using these strategies will take time and practice but are worth the effort. Below are some additional resources to help. If you are concerned about the mental health and wellbeing of anyone in your family, please seek out additional professional support.

- Canadian Pediatric Society Digital Media Resources
  - <https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behaviour-and-development#digital-media>
- American Pediatric Society Family Media Plan
  - <https://www.healthychildren.org/english/fmp/pages/mediaplan.aspx>
- Age-Appropriate Viewing
  - <https://www.cbc.ca/kids/>
  - [https://rating-system.fandom.com/wiki/Canadian\\_Home\\_Video\\_Rating\\_System](https://rating-system.fandom.com/wiki/Canadian_Home_Video_Rating_System)
  - <https://www.common sense media.org/>
- Guidelines on Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour and Sleep: For Children Under 5 Years of Age
  - <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311664/9789241550536-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Media Smarts: Canada’s Centre for Digital and Media Literacy
  - <https://mediasmarts.ca/research-reports>



## References

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**You can consult with a registered psychologist** to find out if psychological interventions might be of help to you. Provincial, territorial, and some municipal associations of psychology may make available a referral list of practicing psychologists that can be searched for appropriate services. For the names and coordinates of provincial and territorial associations of psychology, go to <https://cpa.ca/public/whatisapsychologist/PTassociations/>.

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Your opinion matters! Please contact us with any questions or comments about any of the **PSYCHOLOGY WORKS** Fact Sheets: [factsheets@cpa.ca](mailto:factsheets@cpa.ca)

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